SCHUYLKILL RIVER VILLAS
(Fairmount Park)
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6184

WRITTEN HISTORICAL & DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington D.C. 20013-7127

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Location: Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. Fairmount Park stretches for five miles along the banks of the Schuylkill River and, along with its northern neighbor, Wissahickon Park, comprises almost half of the 8,700 acres administered by the Fairmount Park Commission. The river divides Fairmount Park into an eastern and a western section which exhibit different patterns of villa distribution. Extending from Fairmount Avenue and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway to Ridge Avenue, the East Park contains a relatively dense grouping of villas. The West Park lies between Spring Garden Street and City Line (or Northwestern) Avenue, and its villas tend to be separated by greater distances.

Present Owner and Use: Villas within Fairmount Park are owned by the City of Philadelphia but are generally occupied and maintained by various private organizations.

Dates of Construction: The villas were built between the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Completed by 1745, Belmont Mansion appears to be the earliest house in the park that could qualify as a villa; the latest is either Rockland or Arnest, both erected ca. 1810.

Significance: The mid-nineteenth century creation of Fairmount Park coincidentally preserved a unique example of proto-suburban development in America. Over one hundred years earlier, affluent Philadelphians had started to establish rural retreats outside their city, frequently combining fashionable residential architecture with carefully landscaped grounds. A crucial part of this activity occurred along the banks of the Schuylkill River, within the future bounds of Fairmount Park. The Georgian and Federal-style villas have fared better than their grounds which survive in fragmentary, often illegible form. Yet no other site in the Philadelphia area contains so much evidence of the city's unusual villa-building phenomenon.

Historian: Aaron V. Wunsch, HABS, Summer 1995

History:

Penn's Philadelphia and Early Signs of Extra-urban Development

After receiving an enormous land grant from the King of England in 1681, William Penn promptly began to establish the layout of his new colony, Pennsylvania. He located Philadelphia between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers, ensuring that ships would have easy access to the colonial capital. While this piece of planning reflected much foresight, the boundaries that Penn initially envisioned for his city encompassed an unmanageably large quantity of land. In his revised plans, he excluded a large area from the northern and western parts of the city and designated this tract "the liberty land of free lots."[1] He also decreed that 100 hundred acres of this land and two lots within city limits would be granted to anyone who bought 5,000 acres in the colony.[2] Not until 1854 did the "Liberties" (as they came to be known) become part of Philadelphia proper.

Officially founded in 1682, Philadelphia experienced prosperity and rapid population growth over the next few decades. The city's geographic location facilitated trade, and Penn's commitment to religious tolerance within his colony proved equally attractive. By 1720, roughly 10,000 people could call themselves Philadelphians.[3] Like Penn himself, most of the early settlers were Quakers, and while their numbers included merchants, far more were artisans. At the start of the eighteenth century they

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[1]George B. Tatum, Penn's Great Town (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 18.

[2] Maria M. Thompson, "Evolution of a County Property: 'Laurel Hill,' East Fairmount Park, Philadelphia," 1982 (Fairmount Park Commission archives), 1-2. Not all "liberty land" seems to have changed hands according to this system; see, for instance, the chain of title supplied in Appendix B of Lorraine McVey's "The Cliffs," (an unpublished report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994). While apportioning land in the Liberties, William Penn also acknowledged the validity of certain Dutch and Swedish claims that predated his colony; see Martin J. Rosenblum, R.A. and Associates, "Belmont Mansion, Historic Structures Report," 1992 (Fairmount Park Commission archives), 1.

[3]Sam Bass Warner, Jr., The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 4-5.

were joined by immigrants from Germany, Ireland and Scotland.[4]

Life in the city did not suite all of its inhabitants, and those who could afford to leave on a temporary basis often did so at an early date. In 1698 Gabriel Thomas could already refer to "many Curious and Spacious Buildings which several of the *Gentry* have erected for their Country-Houses"[5] and over the next fifty years such buildings became an increasingly common sight. To some extent William Penn set the precedent for this sort of development when, in the 1680s, he took up residence at Pennsbury, an estate some twenty-five miles north of the newly-founded city.[6] However it was not Pennsbury but country seats like Isaac Norris's Fair Hill (1712) and James Logan's Stenton (1723-30), located several miles outside city limits, that provided a model for extra-urban growth.[7] In general, Norris and Logan erected grander houses than those who followed their lead. More typical of the pattern were small cottages or "Plantation Houses" such as Elizabeth Paschall's original Cedar Grove (1748), containing two or three rooms and often designed to accommodate only daytime visitation; "At best they served as week-end lodges or as retreats from the city during recurrent smallpox scares."[8]

Most plantation-house construction occurred in the liberty lands or, more specifically, in the Northern Liberties (between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers) and in an area west of the Schuylkill known as Blockley Township by the early eighteenth century. Waterways were the focus of intense development: Stenton and Cedar Grove were both located near creeks while John Smith's estate Point-no-Point (ca. 1746) occupied and extensive

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[4]Ibid.

[5]As quoted in Elizabeth McLean, "Town and Country Gardens in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," in British and American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Robert P. Maccubbin and Peter Martin. (Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1984), 137.

[6]Roger W. Moss, The American Country House (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1990), 103.

[7]John M. Dickey and Sandra Mackenzie Lloyd, "Mount Pleasant Historic Structures Report, 1987," p. 7-8, Fairmount Park Commission archives.

[8]Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, Rebels and Gentleman: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1942), 191.

tract along the Delaware.[9] Nor was this pattern coincidental. As part of his effort to make Philadelphia "a greene Country Towne" Penn had encouraged garden cultivation on city lots. A 1698 description of Edward Shippen's "extraordinary fine and large Garden" may indicate that Penn's wishes were occasionally fulfilled, but far more often they were thwarted by row-house builders who made gardening a secondary priority.[10] Those who wanted to surround their houses with substantial gardens would have to look elsewhere, and the well-irrigated Liberties supplied the ideal location.

A Closer Look at the Schuylkill River Valley and the Rise of the "Villa"

In the mid eighteenth century, Philadelphia's ascendancy was becoming clear. The Pennsylvania capital continued to thrive after the French and Indian War (1763) and by the start of the Revolution, it was not only the richest and most powerful city in colonial America but also the second largest in the British Empire.[11] To a large extent, Quaker merchants had been the driving force behind the plantation-house movement, and now they took increasing responsibility for creating the "Athens of America." It was they who dominated the city's political and economic spheres, rising from a "merchant plutocracy into a privileged aristocracy."[12] As the merchant elite experienced this transition, it acquired an increasing affinity for the trappings of European gentility. The new taste was something of an upper-class affectation, but it also reflected "intimate contacts with England and the Continent" that grew more frequent after 1748 when Francis Rawle "initiated the Philadelphia custom of making the Grand Tour."[13]

The character of the rural retreat changed accordingly. The small cottage gave way to a more formal residence that is best described as a villa.

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[9]Ibid., 192.

[10]McLean, op. cit., 136, 137; George B. Tatum, Penn's Great Town (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 24.

[11]Tatum, op. cit., 27; E. Digby Baltzell, Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class (New York: The Free Press, 1958), 179.

[12]Bridenbaugh, op. cit., 13.

[13]Ibid., 193-94.

> ...tracing its origins to houses erected along the Thames river near London [and ultimately to ancient and Renaissance Italian precedent], the "villa" was, in the eighteenth century, a seasonal country dwelling of smallish, symmetrical, and classical character located within a comfortable day's journey by boat, coach, or horse from Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Baltimore. Often with pleasure grounds attached, villas were *in* the country without being *of* the country. Typically they did not adjoin income-producing lands but reflected economic, social, and political success achieved elsewhere. As residences they were to provide a pleasant retreat from the heat and odors of the city, or an escape from the yellow fever, typhoid, and cholera that regularly savaged urban populations.[14]

Even without disease, summertime conditions in Philadelphia could be extremely unpleasant, and when the wealthy decided to "summer" outside the city, their stay usually began in the spring and extended into the fall.[15] Class, of course, was also part of the equation. When the villa-dwellers returned from their retreats, they clustered together in the same part of Philadelphia, now known as Society Hill. Here they waited out the winter, and when springtime finally arrived they repeated their seasonal pilgrimage, illustrating E. Digby Baltzell's dictum "The higher the social class, the more social distance is reinforced by geographical isolation."[16] The increasing popularity of the "country" life during the 1750s is indicated by Scull and Heap's maps depicting more than 200 houses within ten miles of the city limits.[17]

In the 1760s, a section of the Schuylkill River valley was the scene of concentrated villa-building activity. The area lay east of the river, within the Northern Liberties, and its dense

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[14]Moss, op. cit., 4-6. According to Moss, Philadelphians began applying the term "villa" to their rural retreats at the close of the eighteenth century (p. 76).

[15]Ibid., 107.

[16]Baltzell, op. cit., 174, 179.

[17]McLean, op. cit., 137. This figure is somewhat misleading because Scull and Heap's maps make no distinction between "country houses" and houses that are simply located in the country. However, many of the rural property owner's names shown on the maps are also those of city residents, reflecting a settlement pattern with roots in Penn's "liberty lands" allocation system.

foliage, high bluffs and impressive views must have attracted urbanites' attention at an early date. Subdivision served as the catalyst for development. In 1753, Quaker merchant Joshua Fisher purchased roughly 53 acres of a 270-acre tract that had belonged to the Mifflin family since Penn's division of the "liberty lands." Underscoring the landscape's suitability for villa construction, Fisher went on to build The Cliffs on his property, naming it after his grandfather's English estate.[18]

Of greater consequence to the area's character was a series of real estate transactions that began in 1754 after the death of Thomas Shute. During the late seventeenth century, Dennis Rotchford created a 200-acre estate by consolidating lands that William Penn had granted to others, and since 1707 it had been in Shute's possession.[19] The estate formed a promontory known as Edgerlie or Edgeley Point, and Shute used it as a farm, conditionally bequeathing it to his son Joseph. When, in 1754, Joseph failed to meet the terms of his father's will, Abel James bought the property from the elder Shute's executors. Joseph managed to buy back the family farm two years later, but his creditors soon forced him to relinquish it. Twice the land was exposed to public sale, and by the Fall of 1760 it had been divided among five individuals: William Coleman, Benjamin Mifflin, Joseph Galloway, Joshua Howell and the well-traveled Francis Rawle. Most of these men were associated through friendship or business but three of them were also related to Thomas Shute's executor, Edward Warner. As Coleman's brother-in-law, and father-in-law to both Howell and Rawle, Warner represented a significant link between houses that stood or arose along Edgley Point Lane. Coleman erected Woodford in 1756, Rawle's widow (Warner's daughter) Rebecca built Laurel Hill around 1767, and Howell inhabited Edgeley, the old Shute homestead, with Warner's daughter Katherine.[20]

Rebecca Rawle represented another crucial connection between villa-dwellers. Upon her husband Francis's death in 1761, she inherited what had once been John Smith's rural retreat, Point-no-Point (see above). The latter was the scene of Francis's demise, and perhaps this explains Rebecca's decision to establish her own country seat at Laurel Hill. Samuel Shoemaker, a Quaker merchant, lawyer, and politician, married her in 1767, adding a

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[18]McVey, op. cit., 1-2, 4, 14. The Cliffs's construction date is unclear but probably lies at the earlier end of a 1753-1777 time range.

[19]Thompson, op. cit., 1-2.

[20]Ibid., 3-11.

Germantown villa to the family's holdings. In 1797, her son William bought Harleigh, an estate close to his friend William Lewis's Summerville (later Strawberry Mansion). The Summerville property, in turn, bordered Woodford, which William Rawle's sister Margaret and her husband Isaac Wharton had acquired in 1793.[21] Throughout much of her life, Rebecca Rawle documented the constant interaction of the villa-dwellers in her diary,[22] clearly demonstrating that "country" living was *exclusive* not *reclusive* in nature. It was an opportunity to associate with one's peers while displaying that badge of wealth, "social arrival"[23] and cosmopolitan Anglophilia: the villa.

To a large extent, Philadelphia villa architecture was born during the 1760s in areas like Edgeley Point, but a number of substantial "country houses" predated this development by many years. Summing up the transformation of the rural retreat after 1760, Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh have commented, "Quaker simplicity gave way to the new elegance of the Georgian."[24] Such a statement begins to account for the differences between the simple, "Early Georgian" Stenton[25] and examples of "High Georgian" architecture on Edgeley Point, but belies the fact that Quakers were still the primary commissioners of these houses.

Efforts to precisely identify the parties responsible for designing villas outside the city often prove fruitless. Most were probably conceived and erected by members of the Carpenters's Company of Philadelphia under the supervision of a master builder, and this attribution seems especially valid for grand houses like Governor John Penn, Sr.'s Lansdowne (1773).[26] However, gentlemen architects appear to have had a strong influence in the design of such retreats as Belmont Mansion (ca. 1745) and The Solitude (1784-5), discussed below. In any case it is important not to draw too clear a distinction between these creative camps. Even those members of the gentry who dabbled in the discipline of architecture would need to consult with a

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[21]Ibid., 11, 27, 28; Kecia L. Fong, "Laurel Hill, Historic House," (an unpublished report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994), 2.

[22]See Fong, op. cit., 19-20.

[23]The phrase is Thompson's, op. cit., 7.

[24]Bridenbaugh, op. cit., 196.

[25]See Tatum, op. cit., 36.

[26]Moss, op. cit., 84; see also Tatum, op. cit., 36.

master builder before proceeding with their plans, and both designers might well have been familiar with a limited array of pattern books by Anglo-Palladian architects like James Gibbs, Batty Langley, Robert Morris and William Halfpenny.[27]

In evaluating the villa-builders' work, some historians have emphasized the importance of vernacular traditions over pattern books. Others are even willing to assert that Philadelphians' mid-eighteenth-century country seats represented "a new and indigenous architectural form."[28] Perhaps more striking than the differences amongst the villas or between them and other Georgian buildings are their multiple similarities. Mark A. Bower has traced the evolution of the two-story-high, three-bay-wide, hipped-roof house along the banks of the Schuylkill, starting with The Cliffs and reappearing at Laurel Hill, Woodford, The Solitude, Ormiston (1798), Lemon Hill (ca. 1800) and Rockland (1810).[29] Correspondences also appear in the dimensions and locations of these buildings's rooms. The extent to which these variations on a theme bespeak "a vernacular tradition dominated by apprentice-trained craftsmen"[30] is debatable, but to assert that the entire pattern falls within the conventions of Georgian house design would be overly dismissive.

Another chain of related designs began with Mount Pleasant. An exceptional amount of information exists on the latter's construction, due to the survival of Thomas Nevell's daybook. Nevell was a master carpenter who belonged to the Carpenters's Company. Between 1762 and 1765, he built the house for Scotish landowner and privateer John Macpherson, employing a site that had once been part of the Shute estate.[31] Nevell may have based

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[27]On the role of pattern books in Georgian architecture, see Robert Tavernor, Palladio and Palladianism (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991), 178-85.

[28]Compare Bridenbaugh, op. cit., 197-97 to Dickey and Lloyd, op. cit., 9-12.

[29] Mark A. Bower, "Loudon" (Masters Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1986), 7 as discussed in Dickey and Lloyd, op. cit., 9-12.

[30]Dickey and Lloyd, op. cit., 11.

[31]Macpherson purchased the tract from Benjamin Mifflin in 1761; see the chain of title supplied in Jocelyn Kimmel's, "Mount Pleasant, East Fairmount Park, Philadelphia," (an unpublished report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994).

Mount Pleasant on a plate in Abraham Swan's A Collection of Designs in Architecture (1757) and apparently introduced certain architectural devices to the Philadelphia builder's vocabulary. The house's one-bay pedimented pavilion, pierced by a Palladian window, predated similar features on Cliveden in Germantown (1763-67), Port Royal in Frankford (1765-67), Laurel Hill and Woodford.[32] Macpherson's background made him an unconventional villa-builder and his house seems to have set a new standard.

Like most Georgian country seats in the Schuylkill River valley, Mount Pleasant had two, nearly identical facades: one overlooking the water, the other facing the carriage drive. Siting was of paramount importance to villa-builders, who sought to maximize the views their houses commanded, and also took into consideration such utilitarian factors as ventilation. However their overriding concern was the relationship between the house and its grounds, part of a single Anglo-Palladian conception by the mid-eighteenth century. The tracts of land on which villas were located tended to be fairly small, and villa-dwellers did not depend on them for subsistence. In the case of Edgeley Point, subdivision had actually precluded significant agricultural usage;[33] Woodford's lot was a mere twelve acres. While Villa gardens often contained fruits and vegetables, they became increasingly decorative, functioning primarily as a "transition between the house and the landscape."[34]

The study and practice of English landscape-gardening techniques was a major pastime of the eighteenth-century American gentleman and had an especially long history in the Philadelphia area. The earliest colonists to settle in the Pennsylvania capital were often familiar with contemporary English garden design and came prepared with their own horticultural supplies. They perceived no clear-cut distinction between "ornamental" and "practical" gardens, and "It was not really until the mid-eighteenth century that larger landscape gardens began to be laid out around elegant country houses picturesquely positioned along river scenery near the city."[35] By this time the Philadelphia botanist John Bartram

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[32]Dickey and Lloyd, op.cit., 19-20. Those who commissioned Cliveden, Port Royal and Mount Pleasant (Benjamin Chew, Edward Stiles and John Macpherson, respectively) also occupied townhouses in Philadelphia's Dock Ward, where Nevell himself lived.

[33]Fong, op. cit., 19.

[34]Moss, op. cit., 78.

[35]McLean, op. cit., 136, 137.

had established his legendary nursery, producing specimens that reached international buyers. Locally, significant gardens appeared at Germantown estates like Fair Hill and Stenton, but the most celebrated examples were those along the Schuylkill. Among the oldest and most spectacular was Springettsbury's, begun by William Penn and enhanced by his son John. Located south of Edgeley Point on "Faire Mount," Springettsbury was eventually divided into other estates famous for their plantings: Andrew Hamilton's Bush Hill (1740s) and Robert Morris' The Hills (1770s). Henry Pratt's Lemon Hill was carved from the latter around 1800.[36]

Little physical evidence remains of early villa landscapes in the Schuylkill River valley, but it is still possible to form a clear impression of one. Completed in 1745, Belmont was the country seat of William Peters, an Englishman who practiced law and, on account of his connections with the Penn family, held various public offices. An Anglican and son-in-law of a man expelled from the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Peters was an "outsider" in Philadelphia society and actually began work on his "Country Retirement" before owning a townhouse.[37] In 1762, Hannah Callender visited Belmont and recounted:

> After a while passed through a covered passage to the large hall well furnished, the top adorned with instruments of music, coats of arms, crests and other ornaments in stucco, its sides by paintings and statues in bronze. From the front of this hall you have a prospect bounded by the Jerseys like a blue ridge. A broad walk of English Cherry trees leads down to the river. The doors of the house opening opposite admit a prospect of the length of the garden over a broad gravel walk to a large handsome summer house on a green. From the windows a vista is terminated by an obelisk. On the right you enter a labyrinth of hedge of low cedar and spruce. In the middle stands a statue of Apollo. In the garden are statues of Diana, Fame and Mercury with urns. We left the garden for a wood cut into vistas. In the midst is a Chinese temple for a summer house. One avenue gives a fine prospect of the City. With a spy glass you discern the houses and hospital distinctly. Another avenue looks to the obelisk.[38]

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[36]Ibid., 138-40.

[37]Rosenblum, op. cit., 11-15.

[38]As quoted in Rosenblum, op. cit., 24.

Clearly Belmont's grounds were quite elaborate. Peters derived their design partly from Springettsbury, but was also highly attuned to recent English practice in architecture and landscaping. His decision to combine such naturalistic elements as the "wood" with formal avenues and *allees* reflects the influence of English aesthetic concepts that would not affect most other Philadelphia-area gardens for another few decades.[39]

During the American Revolution, William Peters's son Richard joined forces with the rebel government and thus managed to hold onto Belmont. Other villa owners were not so lucky. The war effectively unseated Philadelphia's merchant class, fragmenting it into different camps;[40] some retained their wealth and much of their status, others lost everything. First the British took what they wanted, often destroying the properties of those who failed to side with the Crown.[41] Once the Redcoats departed, other troubles lay in store for the wealthy. Overt Tory sympathies were not an asset, and the Pennsylvania legislature accordingly confiscated villas like Woodford and Laurel Hill, the latter despite Rebecca Rawle Shoemaker's claims that *she*, not her Loyalist husband, owned the estate.[42] The Woodlands almost suffered the same fate, largely because of its owner William Hamilton's taste for English architecture and landscape gardening.[43] As pacifists who refused to take oaths, Quakers encountered much suspicion and hostility. Often they were presumed to be Tories and, like the Fishers of The Cliffs, stripped of many belongings and exiled. Merchants like Robert Morris, who contributed to the revolutionary cause, became rich, but they too endured harassment.[44]

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[39]McLean, op. cit., 137, 141; Rosenblum, op. cit., 25-26.

[40]Richard G. Miller, "The Federal City, 1783-1800," in Philadelphia: A 300 Year History, ed. Russel F. Weigley, 158 (cited in Thompson, op. cit., 15); Warner, op. cit., 23-37.

[41]Timothy Preston Long, "The Woodlands, A 'Matchless Place'" (Masters Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1991), 2.

[42]The Park Houses, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia (Philadelphia: The Associate Committee of Women of the Philadelphia Art Museum, [date?]), Woodford entry (unpaginated); Thompson, op. cit., 1, 15, 21.

[43]Tatum, op. cit., 40.

[44]McVey, op. cit., 15; Warner, op. cit., 25, 34-34, 43-44.

Continuity and Change After the Revolution

Following the War of Independence, Philadelphia quickly regained momentum. By 1775 the city's population had reached 23,000.[45] The war transformed Pennsylvania's capital into the de facto capital of the nation, and throughout the last decade of the century the city officially served this function. Independence came at a price, and it was paid unwillingly by families in the Rawle-Shoemakers's position. Financial troubles beset the Rawle-Shoemakers well into the nineteenth century, ultimately necessitating the sale of Harleigh and Laurel Hill.[46] Nonetheless, a wave of villa construction swept the Philadelphia region in the post-war years, and many of those responsible for it came from the same set as before. For instance, around 1789 the Quaker lawyer, judge and politician William Lewis built Summerville (Strawberry Mansion) just north of Edgeley Point. While the house rose, Lewis leased nearby Woodford from Thomas Paschall, apparently a relative of the illustrious Quaker family at Cedar Grove.[47]

As development on the west side of the Schuylkill soon demonstrated, the colonies' violent separation from England hardly dampened genteel Philadelphia's interest in British taste. Following in the steps of their British counterparts, the villa-builders sought to emulate the Arcadian landscapes described by Virgil and depicted earlier in the century by French painters. Nowhere in the Philadelphia area did the studied naturalism emerging at Belmont appear in more brilliant form than at William Hamilton's The Woodlands.[48]

Subdivision occurred more slowly in Blockley than in the Northern Liberties across the river, and, at its largest, The Woodlands estate encompassed over 500 acres.[49] The son of Independence Hall's designer, Hamilton was friends with such eminent botanists

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[45]Warner, op. cit., 5, 11.

[46]Thompson, op. cit., 33-37, 44.

[47]Jay Platt, "Strawberry Mansion: The History of a Schuylkill River Villa," (a report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994), 3-4; The Park Houses..., op. cit., Woodford entry.

[48]McLean op. cit., 142-43. For a thorough treatment of the subject see Long, op. cit. *passim*.

[49]John R. Stilgoe, Borderland: The Origins of the American Suburb, 1820-1939 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 135.

as John Bartram and Thomas Jefferson. He studied English landscape theory, and after crossing the Atlantic to perform his own inspection, wrote in 1785 "The verdure of England is its greatest beauty and my endeavors shall not be wanting to give the Woodland some resemblance of it."[50] Hamilton introduced several new plant species to the United States and, in addition to laying out his Picturesque grounds, erected multiple greenhouses. In 1803, Jefferson described the Woodlands as "the only rival I have known in America to what may be seen in England."[51]

True to gentlemanly form, William Hamilton also acquainted himself with the latest in English architectural fashion. During the late 1780s, he transformed his forty-five-year-old house into an "outstanding American example of the Adamesque-Federal style," adding "the first giant portico on a Philadelphia building."[52] The style had first appeared in Philadelphia at the start of the 1770s - earlier than in other colonial cities because of Philadelphia's economic, political and cultural primacy at this time.[53] A few miles north of the Woodlands lay Lansdowne, an enormous villa begun by John Penn in 1773 and destroyed by fire in the mid-nineteenth century. Lansdowne essentially belonged to the Anglo-Palladian tradition in which Woodford and Mount Pleasant were built, but its two-story, semicylindrical bays were a Federal-style hallmark that later graced The Woodlands and Chamounix (ca. 1802).[54] Other Adamesque features adorned The Solitude (1784-85), built on a fifteen-acre tract just north of Lansdowne by John Penn's cousin of the same name. Here delicate plasterwork covered the ceilings, a technique also used at Belmont and Mount Pleasant, and ultimately inspired by Roman and Renaissance "grotesques." John Penn designed The Solitude himself, creating a small, highly-symmetrical villa that reflected his penchant for privacy. Like William Peters and William Hamilton, Penn was versed in English ideas on architecture and landscaping. Depicted in John Nancarrow's ca. 1784 "Plan of the Seat of John Penn" (fig. ?), Solitude's grounds included a bowling green, a "Wilderness," twisting paths, a tree-

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[50]As quoted in McLean, op. cit., 142.

[51]Thomas Jefferson to William Hamilton, July 1806, as cited in McLean, op. cit., 143 and Stilgoe, op. cit., 136.

[52]Richard Webster, Philadelphia Preserved (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981) 195, 219.

[53]Sterling Boyd, The Adam Style in America, 1770-1820 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 8; Moss, op. cit., 84-85.

[54]Moss, op. cit., 81-84; Tatum, op. cit., 41, 43, 49.

lined vista and an oblique allee.[55]

Across the river, Federal-style villa-building reached its zenith around 1800 at Henry Pratt's Lemon Hill. The south wall of the house bulged forward in a huge bay, giving exterior expression to three levels of ovoid rooms. Pratt's gardens were the subject of much public interest in the early nineteenth century, and the greenhouse that Robert Morris had left on the property became an especially popular feature.[56]

Disease had always been one of the reasons Philadelphians retreated to the surrounding countryside, but during the early 1790s their exodus took on a new urgency. A 1793 yellow fever epidemic claimed the life of one in ten city residents, and other outbreaks occurred throughout the decade.[57] In the same year, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Prothonotary Edward Burd acquired land that Joseph Galloway had long ago severed from the Shute estate. Burd waited until 1798 to build Ormiston on the Edgeley Point site, apparently modelling his villa on The Solitude - much as nearby Rockland's builder would do in 1810.[58] The landscaping Burd chose to perform was not as complex as Penn's but it is at least as well documented, both in writing and in surveyor John Hills's 1799 "Plan of Ormiston Villa" (fig?).

Philadelphia's bouts with yellow fever also factored into a larger pattern: the rise in country seats designed to accommodate continuous living. Perhaps the best example of this trend is Samuel Breck's Sweetbriar, standing north of The Solitude and across the Schuylkill from The Cliffs. Breck erected Sweetbriar in 1797, and concluded an 1830 diary description of the house and its carefully-landscaped grounds with the words "Sweetbriar is the name of my villa."[59] Yet, technically speaking, Sweetbriar

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[55]Moss, op. cit., 85-89; on the grounds see also McLean, op. cit., 142.

[56]Owen Tasker Robbins, "Toward a Preservation of the Grounds of Lemon Hill in Light of Their Past and Present Significance for Philadelphian" (Masters Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1987), *passim*; Tatum, op. cit., 43-44.

[57]Moss, op. cit., 77.

[58]Moss, op. cit., 88-89; Thompson, op. cit., 18-19.

[59]As quoted in Evan Kopelson, "Sweetbriar Mansion, Western Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania" (an unpublished report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994), 23.

was not a villa but the Breck family's permanent residence, lacking an urban counterpart. It was not the first time a villa-like property had served this purpose. In their old age, genteel Philadelphians occasionally inhabited their country seats year-round, and sometimes these estates actually became working farms.[60] By the late eighteenth century, the reverse was also happening; designed as a farmhouse around 1755, Ridgeland became Francis Johnson's retreat in 1794.[61] The crucial difference between Breck's case and these was that Breck intended to live full-time at Sweetbriar when he built it.

In his diary, Breck chronicled social activities on the west bank of the Schuylkill, portraying a way of life much like the one observed by Rebecca Rawle. Frequently he mentions visiting friends at The Woodlands, Lansdowne and Belmont Mansion.[62] Although he makes no specific references to The Cliffs, there was little to obstruct his view of the latter, supporting Roger Moss's assertion that "By the early nineteenth century, few of the Schuylkill villas were out of sight of one another."[63] Breck also describes visiting Manayunk, the new mill town upriver, and expresses concern about the effects of the Fairmount Dam, completed south of Sweetbriar in 1821. As a result of the dam's existence, Breck eventually suffered the loss of property and, perhaps, of his only child. Understandably, "country" life along the Schuylkill ceased to suit him and he moved back to Philadelphia proper with his wife Jean.

In Breck's day, those who retreated to the outskirts of the city were already feeling the effects of industrialization. Like the Brecks, they often went elsewhere, "summering" on the Jersey Shore by the mid-nineteenth century.[64] Meanwhile, villa-dwellers on the Blockley side of the river were themselves involved in schemes to suburbanize the villa landscape, or rather to create planned suburbs where unplanned ones had existed for over half a

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[60]This was the case with Belmont Mansion; see Rosenblum, op. cit., 51; on the phenomenon, see also Bridenbaugh, op. cit., 191.

[61]See Cathleen Lambert, "Ridgeland Mansion, Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, PA" (an unpublished report compiled for University of Pennsylvania Professor Roger W. Moss, 1994), 5.

[62]See The Recollections of Samuel Breck, H. E. Scudder, ed. (Philadelphia: Porter, 1877), *passim*.

[63]Moss, op. cit., 78.

[64]Thompson, op. cit., 45-46.

century.[65] The way of life that had brought Rebecca Rawle and Samuel Breck happiness, and caused them hardship for different reasons, was on the wane.

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[65]See Stilgoe, op. cit., 136-37.

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Project Information:

The documentation of the Fairmount Park and the Schuylkill River Villas, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) of the National Park Service during the Summer of 1995 in cooperation with the Fairmount Park Commission, William E. Mifflin, Executive Director. For the Fairmount Park Commission, the principals involved were John McIlhenny, Historian; and Peter O'Dell, Managment & Development Administrator. Working on behalf of the Fairmount Park Commission was the Fairmount Park Historic Trust, Larry L. Snyder, Executive Director; and Amy Freitag, Manager of Technical and Design Services. For HABS, the principals involved were Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, HABS; and Robert R. Arzola, HABS Architect; and Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS Historian, who served as project leaders. The overview history for Fairmount Park was produced by HABS summer historian, Maria F. Ali, and the overview and individual reports for the Schuylkill River Villas, by Aaron V. Wunsch. The computer aided drafting, overlay maps of Fairmount Park were produced by HABS architects Robert R. Arzola and, J. Raul Vazquez, and architectural technician, Jonathan Hodge (The Catholic University of America). Large format photography was produced by HABS photographer, Jack E. Boucher.